What's the day to have in store? Nothing much. More work on the Dicmas Project. Maybe set aside an hour to catch up on invoices so they don't bunch up at the month's end. And go to that coffee shop for lunch, where the girl behind the counter always smiles. Such a job, yet still she smiles....

Thinking these boring thoughts, looking out the bus window, Virgil's eyes land on a scrap of paper stuck in the gutter.

A $20 bill? Sure looks like a $20 bill. Virgil sat up and focused.

Yes. A $20 bill. Just sitting there.

Quick rush of though: Would it be worth it to hit the stop button, get off at the corner, grab that money, then catch the next bus. Plenty of time to still make it to work, even on a later bus.

Thought turns to action and, suddenly, Virgil is out of the bus and on the sidewalk. No sooner have his shoes touched concrete than the bus's doors hiss shut and his transportation speeds away.

Well.

A short walk down the street and there's the money. Virgil picks it up. Hunh. One side looks exactly like a $20 bill - Andrew Jackson with that weary, slightly bored expression on his face - but the other side is blank. Nothing but white paper.

Shit. Figures. Real money doesn't just wash up in the gutters.

Nothing for it but to wait now. Another bus should be coming soon. Twenty minutes, thirty at the most.

Shuffling back to the corner, mindlessly turning the phone money over in his hands (something/nothing something/nothing something...) Virgil didn't notice that a girl had appeared in the previously empty bus stop waiting area. He almost walked right into her.

"Oh! Sorry!" he said, pulling back at the last minute.

Whoa.... What is *this*?

The girl was done up in that bizarre, self-mutilation style all the rage with those who,

apparently, must go hunting for pain: studded eyebrows, silver rod through the nose, uncountable earrings on distended earlobes. Neck tattoos crawling right up to her cheeks. Her T-shirt was loose at the chest showing even more studs going behind her collar bones. Jesus.

"What is that?" she asked, nodding at the counterfeit. "Some kind of joke?"

Aside from the overall freak-show effect, she had a genuinely attractive face and a remarkable figure. The droopy T-shirt tightened up around a large, firm bust and the biker's pants she wore might as well been made from cellophane, not spandex. Her eyes, also, were sky-blue. Stunning.

"Hunh? Oh, this?" Virgil held it out for her to take. "No, I don't know. I just found this back there. In the gutter."

The girl stepped back, reached in her bag, and came out with a gun. Her lips formed a hateful snarl.

Virgil froze. His bowels loosened to just shy the of point of no return.

One moment, one movement, and the gun was under Virgil's chin barrel pushing roughly into skin. She had to rise on her toes, but the girl's face came nose to nose with his. Those eyes bore into his like ice-fire.

"You motherfucker," she hissed. "You think you can jackbox me? Me!? Oh, you...," the gun twisted, grinding bone. The air around their mouths smelled, oddly, like mint. She was chewing gum.

Virgil, weakened by fear, slouched. The girl rose up higher. Her bared teeth scraping the tip of his nose when she said, "Who are you? Who sent you?"

Nobody! Virgil tried to wail, but it came out, "nuh... numh.. noho... nuh..."

The girl came down to flat feet. The gun went back in her bag and Virgil's eyes watered over.

He started to collapse, then felt her shoulder under his arm, propping him up.

Then her knee rammed into his balls and the world went dark.

When sight, sound and air returned, Virgil found himself curled up under the

overhang of the bus stop. The concrete under his cheek was cold and grainy. Both hands were cupped around his crotch, which had become a pain power plant, distributing agony to every neighborhood in his body.

The hiss of hydraulic brakes got his attention. On the street, a bus idled. A pair of feet stepped off, paused, then walked away.

The bus drove off. Virgil lifted his head to see....

Bus number 265. His bus.

Great. Now, on top of everything else, he'd be late for work too.